

THE WASATCH STAKE TABERNACLE

THE STRUGGLE TO BUILD IT

From How Beautiful Upon the Mountains, A Centennial History of Wasatch County, Published 1963 by the Wasatch County Chapter of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers

"By 1887, ten years after the Wasatch stake was organized, President Abram Hatch, Stake President, realized the need for a stake house or stake tabernacle. In that year he rallied the people to the cause and built the entire structure with donated labor and materials. Cost of the building was more than \$30,000. However, all donated their quota either in labor, materials, or cash, and the project went forward rapidly. Youngsters, and some older people, would save pennies and nickels and when they had accumulated 25 or 30 cents, make a contribution to the project.

President Hatch served ^{as architect &} as superintendent of the project with Elisha Averett ^{& Alma Theodore Dayton} in charge of the masonry work and Alex Fortie ^{directing the carpentry work.} The shingles on the tower of the building, were cut from sheet metal and placed by Frederick O. Buell. Francis Kirby did the painting. The red sandstone was quarried by hand from mountains east of Heber City in Lake Creek, ^{from the John Crook quarry.}

The building was ready for dedication May 5, 1889, and Elder Francis M. Lyman of the Council of the Twelve came for the dedication. An item in the "Wasatch Wave" of May 4, 1889, noted the event as follows:

"The Stake House is finished and cleaned in beautiful style ready for dedication tomorrow. Conference visitors are expected to clean their feet before entering the building and leave their knives and pencils and tobacco at home."

Then in the "Wave" issue of May 11, 1889, the following was reported:

"The greatest number of people ever congregated in Heber at one time was at the dedication of the Stake House last Sunday and Monday. There were 1300 people in the Stake House on Sunday afternoon and it was stated 200 more could be comfortably seated."

The original plan of the building had an entrance foyer with steps leading into the front gallery. A large assembly room, with the "stand" at the west end, made up the main part of the building. The stand consisted of three elevations of seats. The top seats were reserved for the stake presidency and general authorities. On the middle row of seats were members of the stake high council, while bishops sat on the third row of seats. On each row of seats was a pulpit. Galleries were on the end, north and south sides, with four elevations of seats.

Through the east gallery was an entrance that led up winding steps to the tower where a large bell was hung. This bell was rung each Sunday morning at 9:30 to remind the Saints of Sunday School, and again at 1:30 p.m. to remind them of Sacrament meeting. The bell was also used as a fire alarm or for any other important circumstance that warranted a gathering of the people. For funerals the bell was very slowly tolled as the cortege approached the stake house.

From the dairy of Elizebeth Lindsay comes the following description of the building's heating system:

"The four big "pot bellied" stoves were very important. Uncle Jessie Bond, the janitor for 30 years, went religiously from one to the other stirring them noisely and replenishing the coal and then would disappear into the back room to see about the fire there. If the stirrings came in the middle of a solo or at the climax of a great sermon it made no difference. President Hatch who had traveled outside the state used to tell us about heating plants which might be installed to take the place of these stoves and it sounded fantastic to us."

A definite seating arrangement was prescribed for the building, with men on the south side, women on the north side, ladies with babies around the stoves in the corners and mixed couples in the center. The four stoves stood in the four corners of the building, with considerable space reserved for them.

At the rear, or west end of the building was a smaller meeting room, always called the "back room." Groups such as the Relief Society, Primary, or MIA met in this room. Above this back room was a room called the "circle room" where the high council and stake presidency met to hold their prayer circles.

In the main assembly room the pulpit on the lower row of seats on the stand extended the full width of the stand. This was used for the Sacrament service. Beautiful silver urns, 16 to 18 inches tall were carried by the Deacons down the aisles as they watched very closely to see when it was necessary to refill the large silver cup that was passed from person to person along the benches. The silver was always highly polished for the sacrament and the white linen clothes were always freshly laundered and pressed without a wrinkle."

The red sandstone "Stake House" or stake Tabernacle as it came to be called, was the crowning achievement in Church buildings in the county up to that time and was used continuously until the mid 1960's as the center of all stake activities. It also received much use as a school and community center for plays, high school graduations, musical performances and public meetings. In 1930 or 1931, the building was remodeled. The side galleries and the stand were removed and the back room was replaced with a large stage. A modern heating plant was also installed. The remodeling work was accomplished under the direction of D. A. Broadbent, Stake President.

DEDICATORY PRAYER, FRANCIS M. LYMAN May 5, 1889

Our Father which art in Heaven, we thy sons and daughters, members of thy church and kingdom, who dwell in this stake of Zion, come before thee asking that thy spirit may be with us in this building that has been built by the free will offerings and tithings of the Latter Day Saints of this stake.

We ask thee to bless the ground upon which this building stands, bless the foundation that it may remain firm and unmoved, bless the walls, the rock and the mortars used therein, bless the woodwork, the sleepers, the timbers, and all that pertains unto it. Bless also the seats, the stand, the doors, the windows, and all the furniture contained therein, bless the galleries and the pillars on which they stand, also the paint and the finishing thereof, the roof and the tower and the rooms at the end of the building, and all that pertains unto it. We ask thee, O Father, to accept of it, that thy people may meet with prayerful hearts, and that the inspiration of the Almighty may rest upon all that may meet in this house. May they blessings rest upon the president of this stake and his counselors, the high priests, seventies, elders, and all those who have labored to build this house.

We thank thee that this has been built so speedily, and pray that the climate may be modified that the late and early fruits may ripen and the frost restrained that vegetation may mature.

We thank thee for this beautiful valley, may it be a resting place and home for thy saints. May the saints who shall meet in this house from time to time have the inspiration of the almighty resting upon them, forgive these people for any sins they may have committed.

Bless th y saints (sons) and daughters that they may be preserved in purity, and we dedicate this building unto thee that they may be enabled to receive their blessings in the Temple of the Lord.

We pray also for all the stakes in Zion and all that take part in the building up of thy kingdom here upon earth.

Be pleased to accept this dedication, that this house may be kept holy and pure, and we, thy servants, dedicate this house, people, and all pertaining unto it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

President George Q. Cannon addressed the meeting. he said it was with feelings of great pleasure that he met with the saints on this occasion and was thankful for the good spirit that had prevailed. He hoped that the house would be kept pure. It was now completed and dedicated and should be maintained in its sacredness from that time forth.